

Loránd Eötvös University
Faculty of Humanities
Doctoral School of History
Archaeological Research Program

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

ANIKÓ TÓTH

MORTUARY GIFTS FROM THE 10TH AND 11TH CENTURIES UNEARTHED IN THE *MEZŐSÉG* OF THE
NYÍRSÉG REGION

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The rural zone called *Mezőség* in the region of *Nyírség* is a loessal and sandy micro-rural area in the vicinity of *Tiszavasvár* in *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County* in Hungary; it is moreover the northwestern part of the region referred to above as *Nyírség*. It is surrounded by the *Tisza River* in the north and in the west, which river is sectioned with embayments and has steep banks, while it stretches to the so-called *Lónyai Channel* in the east and to the *Buj-Nyírtelek-Bashalom-Rakamaz* line. In the south it is connected to the western part of the *Nyírség* that shows different soil conditions. This treatise focuses on the burials that date back to the period of the Hungarian Conquest and the Early Árpadian Age. The chapters herein contain the individual descriptions and the complete processing procedure of the cemeteries, as well as the comparisons and analyses of the artifacts and phenomena experienced in the entire region defined above. Owing to lack of written sources in the ages referred to above and to the fact that settlement remnants have been recovered in low number only, I have made efforts to describe how this landscape might have appeared in the 10th and 11th centuries based on the above data and information of avail.

Chapter I – Geomorphology

This chapter deals with the rural nature of the *Mezőség* in the *Nyírség* region and its geomorphic evolution. The most crucial features of the land surface were formed until the end of the *würm*, and it was not supplied with any water by virtue of the restructured water supply system, so that wind took control of the geomorphic process. Good quality prairie soil was formed on the loessal sand and sandy loess. Natural vegetation in the 10th and 11th centuries was composed of fringing forests. The current scenery has been formed as a consequence of significant forestry and agricultural activities started in feudal times, and subsequently of the effects inhibited by river adjusting and flood prevention.

Chapter II - Historic preliminaries

This region was unpopulated until the end of Prehistoric times, and only one artifact that can be connected to the *Gravette Culture* comes from the Paleolithic. The first vital settlement can be connected with the *Linear Pottery Culture of the Great Hungarian Plain*, and it remained ceaselessly populated up to a lesser and larger extent until the end of the 9th century, which definition of the aforementioned extent might have been influenced by the intensity of research.

Chapter III - Research history and data used

The research activity conducted in concern to the age of the Hungarian Conquest in *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg* County may have been launched very early, and enormous attention was paid to it thanks to the enthusiasm of **András Jósa**, museum founder and director. The very first artifact typical to the age came from the narrow zone of the site, *id est* the vicinity of *Tiszaeszlár-Sinkahegy*, at the time the construction of the protective bank was commenced after the flood of the **Tisza River** in 1888. **Jósa**'s successor, the ethnographer **Lajos Kiss**, continued to expand the collection with equally utmost devotion. Cemeteries were recovered between the two World Wars by agricultural activities, road constructions and clay or sand mining, and the finders were interviewed, the sites were recorded, and the artifacts were collected as applicable. Field reconnaissance and excavations of **József Rohács**, a shoemaker in **Tiszaölök** and an amateur archaeologist and local historian, which he could easily implement due to his unclouded relations with the locals and his in-depth knowledge of the local landscape, substantially enhanced the growth of the collection from the 1930s. Although drawings and photos had never been recorded, and that he was primarily engaged in the research of tombs with grave goods, and that he considered anthropological materials as irrelevant, he could manage to compile surprisingly explicit descriptions, while his cemetery maps as resources were of high importance in the course of the processing procedure of the artifacts. Graves and cemetery sections that were rescued and recorded by experts with more and more excelled documentation techniques had been found during constructions and mining mostly in the period subsequent to World War 2. **István Dienes, Nándor Fettich, Eszter Istvánovits, László Kovács, Júlia Kovalovszky, Pál Lipták, Gábor Lőrinczy, István Méri, Péter Németh and Mihály Párducz** were in charge of the archaeological excavations carried out in the region, yet only a few publications were featured. As in every aspect, the options of archaeology were restricted in this sense as well: especially the large cemeteries of the commonalty and those of the well-to-do can be considered as partially excavated due to the difficulties inflicted by fiscal shortage and the weather conditions, as well as by the size of the cultivated and covered lands. The archaeological assemblage is composed of the collections of four museums, namely the **Déri Múzeum**, the **Jósa András Múzeum**, the **Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum** and the **Tiszaeszlári Múzeum** which even separately safeguard the assemblage of a specific archaeological site. The documentation was once available in the archives of the **Jósa András Múzeum** and of the **Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum** and in the so-called **Dienes bequest** that

was even more scattered at the time research started. The archival discrepancies of excavations conducted by old amateurs, the mixed assemblages and their partial losses caused the most outstanding problems in the course of artifact collection and assessment. Of the historic problems connected with the age of the Hungarian Conquest, the origins of the peoples settled in the *Mezőség* of the *Nyírség* region, their social hierarchy, their family structure, the issue why the majority of the dead buried in the cemeteries were men, the very particular features of these cemeteries, the severe changes implying the modification of the assemblages and the artificial diversion of the population taking place around the middle and the second part of the century as stated by certain scholars must be noted.

Chapter IV – Mortuary gifts from the 10th and 11th centuries unearthed in the *Mezőség* of the *Nyírség* region

The cemetery assessments discussed in this chapter serve as the ground of this doctoral dissertation. Vast majority of the reports connected with the cemeteries, cemetery sections and stray finds remained unpublished, but the dissemination of these might be noteworthy to describe the age comprehensively despite their insufficient contents therein. Therefore, I considered the re-assessment of these materials in accordance with the current scheme as substantial even in view of the already published archaeological sites, because they closely pertained to the dissemination of the assemblages recovered save one or two cases, and moreover, the statements linked to them and announced on the basis of the research results known since then must be the subject of reconsideration. The assemblages stored in museum warehouses and the archives report on 32 cemeteries that date back to the 10th and 11th centuries. As many as 29 certain archaeological sites and one questionable can be identified in the region, and these should be supplemented with the consequences of the archaeological site identification projects consummated by *István Dienes* and *Péter Németh* in the beginning of the 1970s; some erroneous data were cancelled and two cemetery sections were defined as identical owing to which the number above reduced. Reports on stray finds have been available only in certain cases, but specific archaeological sites, where the assemblages were rescued and the finders were interviewed, provided a bit more information. Although the documentation quality of the archaeological excavations conducted in the '20s and '30s left much desired for, they were not any worse in view of analyses than the salvage excavations linked to the large-scale investments carried out in the subsequent time periods. Majority of the data can be derived from research completed by experts endeavoring to conduct full-scale

excavations; however, comprehensive description in this case is also distorted by the fact that such excavations were conducted in respect to spectacularly rich cemeteries only, so that our notion concerning the "classic" cemetery sites of the commonalty requires additional information. The descriptions of the burials, and subsequently the analyses of the recovered assemblages as per type, as well as the dissemination of the parallels follow the accounts of the excavation site circumstances in the course of the processing procedure of each archaeological excavation site. Even the reconstruction of the costumes' details associated with the rituals could have been attempted when analyzing the burial habits, if fortunate excavation circumstances and proper documentation sources were available. The definition of the cemeteries' structures and chronology may have been performed depending on the quantity of the cemetery maps and anthropological data.

Chapter V - Burial rituals

The cemeteries' level of disturbance, the discrepancies in their excavation methods, the incomplete documentations of cemeteries excavated by past amateurs and the negligible quantity of anthropological data related to them grossly aggravated the analyses of the cemeteries and the definition of the cemetery structures and of the chronology of burials belonging to the occupation phases. However, specific elements of the burial rituals were required to and worthy to have been examined despite the foregoing, and they should have been subject to comparison in certain cases of diverse cemeteries. The nature of the cemeteries is appropriate to the general conditions to have been present in the age. No remarkable deviations can be identified, but exclusivity must be questioned in specific cases as regards specific phenomena perceived by research and explained by religious causes. The function of religion must be considered as extraordinary in case of the burial rituals, but to form well-grounded explanations concerning them seem to be quite impossible owing to controversies. The cemeteries were generally row cemeteries; there were also two graveyards, and data demonstrated multilayer burials on two other sites. The orientations of the graves were west to east and north-west to south-east, and they were aligned into north to south rows. Graves with different orientations were typical to burials of the Árpadian Age only. The positions of the dead bodies were also archetypal: these were extended burials. There were two contracted burials, out of which the one verified by drawn documentation, hence its classification so, was explained by science in two ways, to wit either the suspicion of witchcraft or the servant status, of which the latter one is more probable based on the

circumstances revealed. The disposal and position of arms and hands in burials show considerable variations: as many as 18 different positions were observed. Although negligible quantity of drawings or photo documentations have been of avail and only descriptions might be relied on, it can be concluded that these variations also demonstrated differences depending on the nature and chronology of the cemeteries and the gender and the age of the dead bodies. The highest level of variations could have been observed in case of commonalty cemeteries dating back to the 10th century. Ritual causes can be disregarded in case of disturbances from the 10th century, because the main objective must have been the despoiling of graves, if their sumptuous equipment is assumed. No assumptions can be concluded in case of the only one salvage site from the Árpáadian Age due to inappropriate documentation. The existence of symbolic burials is not unequivocally acknowledged by the scholars. Such existence can only be likely in this territory. The positions of find materials, to say parts of clothing and objects as funerary goods placed in tombs, represent the easily recognizable, but unambiguously and uniformly inexplicable phenomenon of the burial rituals. Clothing techniques, the unbuttoning method of the clothes, the way to take off the belts, the weapons attached to the belts, the separate storage of utensils and their positions on the converse side, as well as their damages inspired many hypotheses which were generally explained in association with religious beliefs. These hypotheses equally cherish causes, such as the mirror-like reflection of afterlife, the fear of being haunted, the left-handedness of the dead and simple practical reasons (sufficient space was available to place the actual object on that specific spot). Without the proper knowledge of the beliefs, we can only collect and record these rituals – their indubitable analyses is not possible at all. The clarification of this issue is further prevented by the fact that the rituals were not uniform. Although it has been observed that a specific type of object was placed the identical way in each case as regards specific cemeteries, the general view changed in every grave in case of others. The presence of sharp and pointed objects in the tombs has been considered as a ritual that is difficult to be distinguished from the foregoing and as an action to prevent being haunted. This rather characterizes the graves of women. The only case considered as mutilation in my opinion is disputable, because different gender identification can imply a different explanation. Horse burials were found only in cemeteries dating back to the 10th century. The nature of these and the age and gender ratio of the dead buried in them completely reflect the comprehensive situation in the Carpathian Basin. Extraordinary circumstances were discerned in case of one cemetery only: neither a horse nor any horse trapping was placed along a man's dead body that was considered as a prestigious figure based on the mortuary gifts in cemetery II. of

Tiszaeszlár-Bashalom. Another tomb was excavated in the very same cemetery, into which only a horse was buried without human remains. Whether the man in it was unburied by virtue of looting - although unlikely -, or it may have been the subject of a symbolic burial ritual, or it can presumably be associated with the aforementioned grave without a horse in some closely indefinable manner is still the subject of further research due to the unfortunately disturbed nature of the grave. Food offerings can be extrapolated on the basis of utensils and animal bones. Nearly all of these were linked to burials of the 10th century, except for one, whereas the remains of an egg were found next to a child lying in a grave from the 11th century. Differences were detected as regards the rate of gender and age in each cemetery. Shroud remains came to light from opulent burials dating back to the 10th century. **Obolus** were practically used in the Árpáadian Age, but coins presumably as *obolus* placed in a grave were found in a child's tomb dating back to the 10th century. The excavation zone is inappropriate for statistical analyses due to the discrepancies of the method applied to define gender and age, but based on the current data we can state that *obolus* were provided independently from gender and age.

Chapter VI – The artifacts

The dissemination of the finds was completed in accordance with the chronological order applied for the assessment of the cemeteries. How the objects appeared as per gender and age, and the examination of the frequency concerning each epoch were serious aspects in the course of artifact typology. Compared to the research results to date and the areas already processed (primarily to the results of *Rétköz*) I attempted to align them with the general situation in the Carpathian Basin with special regard to the analogies and striking deviations. Of the jewelry and dress fittings, but also given the entirety of the artifacts, lockrings were recovered conspicuously in the highest number. These hairrings, even though not in the largest quantity, were found in equal proportions in the area. The expansion of the S-terminalled lockrings took place in the first quarter of the 11th century. Five different types of earrings were identified, out of which two were found in a very low quantity - namely earrings with cast-beadrow pendant and earrings with grape bunch pendant (the latter one came to light from tombs dated back to the 10th and 11th centuries). These were found not only in many graves, but also in many cemeteries. Both categories of the braid ornaments (cast and plated) with notable quality differences were detected amongst the women of the middle social stratum and the commonalty, and in addition shell jewelry with a similar

function was also found. The diversity of the depictions is also wide – six different patterns have been identified. *Torques* in low quantity came from sites that rooted back to the Árpádian Age. Beads with numerous shape variations in large quantity have been known from this area. These were primarily used for luxurious burials in the 10th century. The largest portion was composed of seed-beads and various eye-beads which also had a hair decoration function, while metal foil inlaid beads as necklace decoration were applied in addition to the huge amount of seed-bead in the 11th century. Of the rare pendants, two types – the leaf-shaped and the crescent-shaped pendant – were uncovered in many cemeteries in many burials that could have been connected with the middle social stratum and the commonalty. The so-called *lunula* type was unearthed on excavation sites dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries. Cast and pressed ball buttons, which were primarily recovered in rich burials, came from the 10th century only that increases their higher proportion within the assemblage. Rings with a wide variety in large quantity have been known. They were present at rich burials in low quantity in the 10th century. Their amount notably increased in the Árpádian Age, and they became the most popular jewelry along with the lockrings. Bracelets witnessed reverse tendency: their great variety in the beginning (different forms of chain, plated, wired and twisted types) crucially decreased and only wired bracelets with different diameters came from the 11th century. Metal dress fittings in low amount were discovered in 10th century tombs, more specifically shift ornaments, of which rhombus-shaped version was detected in rich cemeteries only, meanwhile double-pendants were found on sites connected with the commonalty. Mounted footwear was come across in six burials of four 10th century cemeteries, and accurate observations provided basis for reconstruction in two cases. Of the objects defined as rank insignia by *L. Révész*, mounted belts were uncovered in the highest number. As a matter of fact, several variations of these in this function were unearthed in nine graves in four 10th century cemeteries in either untouched or damaged condition either *in situ* or let loose beside the body placed in the tomb within the same cemetery. They varied in shape as well, and relation was identified only between a fractured set once certainly used as a belt set and a belt mount with secondary function that came from a woman's grave. Mount ornamented sabretaches were come across in three graves. In two cases (a plated and a mount ornamented) they were uncovered as funerary goods which suit the general view; belt mounts, horses and horse trappings were placed along with the dead bodies of men, and even a saber, a quiver for bow and arrows and separately arrows laid next to one of them. The third case showed a different view: a mount ornamented sabretache was unearthed in the grave of an adolescent boy which was quite a rare case in the Carpathian Basin, but was not a unique

phenomenon. However, neither a belt, nor any weapon, nor any horse was placed beside him. Of weapons, arrow-heads were uncovered in the largest quantity and ratio. Their shape largely fluctuates, but the frequency of the types reflects the general situation of the Carpathian Basin. Their positions in the tombs also vary. The graves abundant in funerary goods, the content of the assemblage and the number of the arrows do not support Gy. László's assumption specifically that the quantity of the funerary furnishing placed in graves would have any rank insignia function. The last pieces of the arrows were probably placed into the earth not later than the end of the 10th century. Quivers were uncovered in less quantity and bone bracket bows were found in even lesser amount, and although the disturbance of the tombs and the discrepancies of the documentation might have added to such phenomenon, our insufficient knowledge in respect to the burial rituals has been confirmed by the fact that there was only one grave in which a bow, a quiver and arrows in one single cluster were discovered. Very few sabers and axes were unearthed which absolutely suit the general situation observed in the Carpathian Basin based on their circumstances. While the graves with sabers were usually abundant in equipment, axes represent the accompanying gifts of poor burials. Horse burials and burials with horse trappings were detected only in 10th century graves. Horse bits, stirrups and girth buckles as horse trappings were placed in the tombs, and two sets of saddle ornament were uncovered in one case, but neither bridle ornaments came to light from the graves of men or women as documentations have recorded, nor bone carvings nor metal plates decorated the saddles. Double-ring bridle bits of fowls were unearthed in vast majority of the cases, and the version with side cheek-pieces was come across in three tombs only. The latter one was placed nearby women or men buried in graves equipped with mortuary gifts richly as I. Dienes concluded, but the less secure bridle bits of fowls were placed next to the prestigious dead buried into graves similarly abundant in equipment in other cemeteries. Several different types of stirrups were uncovered; the most frequent one had the shape of a pear. In some cases two different types were uncovered in the same grave, while another had a different size. As I. Dienes assumed, the latter one were classic among poor warriors, yet one of the two cases observed in our territory provided the same type in the grave of a woman that was abundant in accompanying gifts. Of the utensils, knives were unearthed the most frequently. These were found nearby men and women in the same ratio, and their positions in the grave were identical. The knives as precautionary means were the quintessence of women's tombs mainly. One was found as an extraordinary artifact: there was a trepanation knife in a woman's grave from the 10th century. Fire striking steel and flint stone was found in relatively low number and only nearby men irrespective of their

property status. Whetstones, howels, bucket components and needles were discovered as individual artifacts. Clay pottery was also rare, only four graves contained such artifacts, and although no conclusion can be formulated owing to the negligible quantity these artifacts had, it must be noted that they were uncovered in the tombs of men, women and children alike, and their positions in the graves varied. Coins were placed in the graves both in the 10th and 11th centuries – in early times nearby men and children only, but subsequently nearby men, women and children alike in a deviating ratio in the Árpadian Age. Their function was miscellaneous in cemeteries closed in the 10th century. Western coins presumably as *obolus* were placed next to a child, whilst they functioned as dress fittings sewn on the clothes of men. Byzantine coins drilled through and laced as neckchains were worn as was the case concerning a Roman bronze coin dating back to the 4th century that was unique in this area. The amount of coins placed in graves was incremental in parallel with the decreasing trend in the number of other tomb furnishings in the 11th century. These coins probably as *obolus* were given the dead in each case at that time, but the function of having been worn as necklaces was assumed as regards two graves of children.

Chapter VII - *Mezőség* of the *Nyírség* in the 10th and 11th centuries

The conquering Hungarians arriving in the Carpathian Basin discovered beneficial conditions as regards climate, water supply and the fauna and flora. The narrow land had good quality soil as well. The archaeological excavation sites of the *Mezőség* in the *Nyírség* region dating back to the 10th century were located primarily in the eastern and north-eastern part of the region, but scattered ones have been located in the entire territory. Influential centers were not established in those days. Connection between two cemeteries of the ***Tiszaeszlár-Bashalom-Fenyvespart*** line could have been identified as regards salvage sites located relatively nearby. Vast majority of the cemeteries that originated in the 10th century had been opened sometime in the initial third of said century, and these were closed not later than the second third and/or third quarter of the same century. There was only one fully excavated cemetery which might have been opened sometime in the middle of said century and was in use until the end of the 10th century and/or the very beginning of the 11th century. The social hierarchy of the settling people was quite complex as was the case in other areas of the Carpathian Basin, so that no clear classes can be defined. The content of the population of the cemeteries and the comparison performed on the basis of the rituals and the assemblages indicate a more colorful and variegated view as opposed to the preceding more conservative classification. Ethnic

definition of the settling population, i.e. the issue of *Khabars*, has triggered substantial conflict in standpoints. The assemblage unearthed here and the burial rituals perceived do not display such dissimilarities compared to other rural areas based on which we could assume a population with digressing origins. Cemeteries located in the *Upper Tisza River* region in the area of *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg* County linked to the prince's military escort and demonstrating a grossly distorted view in the ratio of the genders scarcely concern the micro-region of *Mezőség* in the *Nyírség* region, and they cannot be identified west of the *Bashalom* line. The notion that subsequently to the restructuring act of power in the middle of the 10th century these cemeteries had ceased to have been used as a consequence of the termination and resettlement of the military escort by which new populations were settled in the settlement zone of said escort has been associated with these cemeteries. This resettlement process can neither be defined in our land precisely, nor checked owing to severely insufficient anthropological data. The transition period taking place in the *Mezőség* of the *Nyírség* region in the 10th and 11th centuries is difficult to be defined, since the salvage sites already excavated and subject to assessment can be dated to either the former or the latter century. *Tiszalök-Vajasdomb* was a cemetery that could have been defined as a witness of such transition between the two centuries referred to above, and so was *Tiszavasvári-Józsefháza* probably on the basis of its assemblage and burial features. The latter one, however, did not provide any aid in such point of view owing to its fractured nature. The act of change taking place at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries can be defined in the cemetery of *Vajasdomb* even if it had no spectacular tracks: S-terminalled lockrings appeared, and further jewelry that represented rather the 11th century was also uncovered. Salvage sites originating in the Árpadian Age mainly condensed in the north-western and central part of the region, but they also appeared elsewhere similarly to the ones of the 10th century. Heavily populated area was located between *Tiszadada* and *Tiszalök* in the line of the *Tisza River* and south of *Tiszaeszlár*. Comparing the archaeological excavations sites to the localizable villages known by instruments it can be claimed that cemeteries of the Árpadian Age unknown so far might lie in this region in a massive number despite the serious gravity of research already completed, and it can also be claimed that there must be many cemeteries dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries which cannot be associated with any settlement.